

THE CLASSIC FORCE

LEARNING & MASTERING A LEGENDARY SLEIGHT

BY STEVEN YOUELL

Revised 11/23/2011

©2011 Steven Youell

Starting Out

Here's the basic idea of the Classic Force in a nutshell: You're going to hold a break above the force card and then spread cards from your left to your right hand while asking a spectator to take one. Then you're going to time the spreading of the cards so that at the exact moment they touch a card, the force card is right under their fingers. It sounds hard, but there are really only two obstacles you have to overcome: learning the timing and eliminating the fear. Hopefully, this monograph will help you do both.

Most standard texts describe various methods of getting the card into place using false shuffles and cuts, but for now, don't worry about sophisticated shuffles and placements because they'll become problematic if you learn the force in the manner I suggest.

Here's the specific procedure I use to Classic Force a card.

I obtain a break above the force card at about the middle of the deck. Then as I spread the cards, I release the break and use my left fingers to loosely maintain a block of cards composed of the force card and all the cards below it. This should not create a significant angle between the upper packet and the lower packet.

Here's an edge on view so you can see there's almost no angle between the upper half and the lower half.



Here's a picture of what it looks like right after I release the break. The force card is blue and the deck is red so you can readily tell the difference. Between maintaining the block and visually tracking the card, you have total control over it. Also note that the spread is tight, which makes it more difficult for a spectator to grab a card from the top half of the deck.



The actual spread I use is slightly larger than what's pictured, but not much. The key is to keep a balance between having the spread too small and having it too large, which would allow the audience too many available cards.

I then continue to spread cards from my left hand into my right hand, timing the spread so when the spectator actually touches a card, the card under her fingers is the force card. It's also important to maintain a steady speed as you're spreading the cards.

Learning The Timing

Since the biggest blockades to learning the Classic Force are psychological, the following procedure tends to eliminate those blockades by allowing you to start with a wider target and then reducing that target to a specific card while at the same time, giving you feedback on your timing. Before you go out of the house, put the King of Spades on top of the deck followed by the King of Diamonds. Then place the King of Clubs on the bottom of the deck and finally put the King of Hearts on the bottom of the deck. If you cut the deck, the Kings will be in CHaSeD order in the center of the deck. Then case the deck.

When you're in the wild and have an opportunity to do a trick, take the deck out, cut the deck at about the center and hold a break. Then try and force one of the kings. Since you're only trying to get them to take ONE of FOUR cards and the trick does not depend on your success there should be no pressure whatsoever. Remember-- you're practicing the force, not actually using or depending on it.

Once you're completely confident you can hit one of the Kings every time, start trying to force the King below the break (The King of Spades).

While you're performing, don't think about which King they took or how far off you were. You have other things to think about during your performance. At the conclusion of the trick, you'll know which King was selected so you'll also know how far off you were since the Kings are in CHaSeD order. The feedback you get from this technique will allow you to adjust your timing appropriately: if you constantly hit on the Kings above the break, you're moving a little slow and if you hit on the King of Diamonds, you're moving a little too fast.

Eventually you'll be able to hit the King below the break almost every time and then you're well on your way to mastering the Classic Force.

As you're using this method, it will occur to you that you can easily tell which King they picked by the process of elimination or even be knowing the order of the Kings, but please don't treat this as a control until it's served its purpose in helping you learn the Classic Force. Experimenting with the procedure will only complicate things.¹

¹ John Scarne used this as a controlled force, but not as a mechanism for learning the timing of the force and not with four of a kind-- he just memorized the bottom four cards, cut the deck and forced the cards from behind his back. It was published in *Hilliard's Card Magic* on page 196.

I realize that this procedure skips the false shuffle at the beginning, but remember that you're learning the Classic Force and you're doing a trick that does not require the Classic Force, so in my opinion, the false shuffle won't add much. But if you're a purist, you can do a riffle shuffle while keeping the Kings on bottom and top. With this setup the Overhand Shuffle technique required to maintain the stock would just complicate things, especially for a beginner.

The Standard Advice

The standard advice is to try and Classic Force a card every time you do a trick, but I'm not so sure I agree with that if you're just starting out in Magic because it just adds to the pressure. If you're a novice at Card Magic and decide to take that advice , I'd suggest the following: Don't worry about the identity of the card. Shuffle, cut, hold a break and attempt the force. You're just practicing so the identity doesn't matter and trying to know the identity leads to more worrisome things-- like glimpsing the card and then positioning the card. It also allows you to make attempts several times during a routine without having to glimpse and position. Not knowing the identity of the force card also lessens the payoff so when you hit it, that joyous expression that could tip off the audience should be damped and you won't be tempted to celebrate (see below). In most cases this will also allow you to occasionally let a spectator shuffle the deck before the selection which lessens the chance of them thinking you're doing anything fishy during the selection procedure, which is important when you're doing a force.

No Parrots

Do not use the same line every time you attempt the force because it's too easy to be rhythmic and become dependent on that rhythm. If you allow this to happen, you'll lose the illusion of spontaneity. Too many times I've seen a performer completely thrown off when someone interrupts a memorized script-- and having this happen when you really need to use the Classic Force is something you don't want to happen.

When you get the timing down to the point where you're only using the Classic Force when you need to use it, you can carefully pick out a few lines that imply randomness and the attitude that you don't care which card they select. So carefully pick out a few lines and rotate them in and out. Why carefully? Listen to Robert-Houdin:

It is well to say take, and not choose, though the latter word is frequently used. The word choose implies a liberty of action which it is better not to suggest too strongly.
-- *Secrets of Conjuring and Magic*

So think carefully about the lines before you get into the habit of using them. By the way, the absolute best line I've ever heard for the Classic Force is from Kent Gunn: "*Just reach in there and snag one...*"

No Celebrations

Nothing says "novice" more than a performer hitting the force and then handing the pack to the spectator with glee saying "*Please-- put the card back into the deck and shuffle it yourself...*" When you use the Classic Force, have the spectator replace the card while you hold the deck. There should be no difference in the replacement procedure you most commonly use. You don't want the audience to think there's any difference between the card they just selected and the other cards they've seen selected. If you want the card lost in the deck, have it replaced, shuffle the deck yourself and then let the spectator shuffle the deck. Jean Hugard wrote something like this in *Expert Card Technique* (page 186), but it was slightly different. I think that the above procedure avoids suspicion because a) the replacement procedure is consistent and b) because of the time difference, it disassociates the shuffle from the selection procedure.

Once you're able to hit most of the time and are starting to get really good at the Classic Force, the last step is to eliminate the fear of what happens the few times you miss.

Can The Classic Force Be 100%?

The Classic Force is still thought of as inferior to other forces in terms of reliability and the general consensus is that the Classic Force is not 100% reliable. But what does that really mean? First, let's do the math.

If the Classic Force was successful 99.999% of the time, you could still say it's not 100% reliable. In fact, if you did the Classic Force over a million times and missed once, then by definition, it's not 100% reliable. I'll put it another way. You could do the Classic Force 500 times a day, seven days a week for the rest of your life. Miss once and you could say it's not 100% reliable.

At what number do you round up? If I remember correctly, Engineers refer to something as "Five Nines." This means that if something is 99.999% pure, then it's acceptable to call it pure. So if a force is 99.999% sure, is it acceptable to call it sure fire?

Then there is the matter of defining terms. At what point do you consider a force as "failed?" For example, if someone demands a different card after you've forced a card via The Hindu Shuffle-- is that a "failure"? Technically, no, because they chose the right card the first time. What if you say "sure, pick another one" and then run through the entire procedure again but this time they're happy? Since you were able to force the card to the same spectator (who is now happy), using the same force, would you consider that a success since it's the same time, place and spectator? Or is it one hit and one miss?

So the effectiveness of a force becomes a matter of how you use math and how you define your terms-- both of which are arbitrary. Given the above considerations, I don't think one force has anything over any other force in terms of reliability. So where do we go from here?

I believe the Classic Force *can be made* to be 100% reliable-- even if they grab the wrong card. I have a hit rate of about 99.5%, but I also have a way to cover that 0.5%, thus making the Classic Force 100% sure.

Eliminating The Fear

As I've already mentioned, one of the primary blockades to learning the Classic Forcing is fear. Fear of missing, fear of having to switch gears to do another trick or fear of being detected because some spectator who hates his job decides to take it out on you by being difficult. Eliminate that fear and the Classic Force can be learned much more quickly than you'd think.

I've used the following method for over 30 years and it was instrumental in eliminating any fear I had of the Classic Force. From the audience's perspective, there is nothing suspect here-- they think it was the precise procedure I had in mind. So while the procedure is a little different, the results are the same: the spectator will believe they had a completely free/random choice.

Since the worst case scenario is that a spectator withdraws the wrong card, that is the situation I wanted to prepare for. So I'm standing there, the spectator has the wrong card in their hands. What do I do? This is the situation that puts enough fear in someone that they avoid trying/learning the Classic Force. And as I already mentioned, the standard advice of just doing another trick not only puts pressure on someone trying to learn the Classic Force, it's also useless in a pre-determined set of card magic.

The lights went on about 30 years ago when I was reading *The Amateur Magician's Handbook* and found the *Stanley Collins Force*, or the *Knife Force* as it's more commonly called. This procedure gave me absolute confidence in learning and using the Classic Force.²

Understanding The Basic Mechanics

Let's suppose that you have a break below the force card and the spectator grabs the wrong card. The *very second* you see the wrong card being pulled out, say "*OK, now just turn it face up.*" **This timing is crucial because you want her to believe that you intended for that card to be turned face-up from the very beginning.**

Maintain the break below the force card and explain "*Now, I want a truly random card here, so we're going to make sure that neither one of our unconscious minds-- sorry, I meant subconscious minds, haven't swayed the decision. So I'm just going to go through the deck like this...*" Do a slow riffle with your right fingers from the bottom of the deck..."*and you stick that card face up anywhere in the deck so it's face to face with a random card.*" Don't riffle

² The idea of using the missed force card as a locator for the Collins force appears in both Greater Magic, (page 193) and The Amateur Magician's Handbook (page 42).

the corner of the deck with your left thumb-- that's not a large enough target. Use a full frontal riffle.

Time the riffle so the spectator sticks the card they're holding face up below the break. From this point on, I will refer to that face up card as the "indicator" card. Now you're holding a face-down deck in your left hand with an indicator card sticking halfway out of the deck. And you're still holding a break below the force card.

Move your left thumb alongside the left edge of the deck and clip the indicator card between your right forefinger and your right middle finger. Your right thumb should be at the rear of the deck, which means your right forefinger and thumb are in the perfect position to grasp all the cards above the break. You can see this position in the photo to the right.



Holding all the cards above the break between your right thumb and forefinger, move your right hand forward with the indicator card still clipped between your right forefinger and middle finger.



Continue to move your right hand forward until the indicator card clears the deck. Make sure that as you draw the upper packet forward, your right middle finger draws back slightly so the indicator card is flush to the force card and is not at an angle.



Place the cards in your right hand (with the out jogged indicator card) on the cards in your left hand. You have now secretly re-positioned the face-up card so that it is face-to-face with the force card.



These are the basics of the force, with one exception: traditionally the upper packet and the indicator card would not be replaced, but rather given to the spectator or placed on a table. I've changed it for several reasons. First, handing a spectator a packet of cards that has an out jogged card underneath it is rather awkward for everyone. Second, as you'll soon see, I use a presentation that allows you to ask the spectator if she wants to change her mind *after the card has been repositioned*. Finally, replacing the packet allows me to ribbon spread the deck with the indicator card still out jogged, so I can seem to be particularly fair (see below).

More importantly, replacing the packet gives you a huge psychological advantage, because when you ask her if she wants to change her mind, she'll see something like the photo to the right. The beauty is that *once she confirms the position of the card, it doesn't move! But it's only after she confirms the position of the card that she'll watch to make sure it doesn't move*. In short, the heat is on only *after* you're clean!



If the spectator changes her mind, it's a simple matter to retake the break as you remove the indicator card and start over again. This entire procedure takes about five seconds from the point where the spectator sticks the indicator card in the deck.

With the indicator card repositioned, ribbon spread the deck face down on the table (doesn't that look fair?) and with one finger, move all the cards above the force card away and then move all the cards below the indicator card away.

Take away the indicator card, isolating the force card and say something like "*Now that's a random selection!*"



Without A Table

Finally, even if you're not using a table, it's fairly easy to adapt without losing any effectiveness. Let's assume you've already repositioned the indicator card by completing the mechanics of the force.

Make sure your right hand is some distance away from the deck and ask her if she wants to change her mind.



After she's confirmed the position of the face up card, slowly and carefully spread the cards until you come to the force card, which is directly above the indicator card. As you get closer to the force card, spread cards more slowly and push the last few cards over one at a time so there's no doubt that you're going to hand her the exact card that's next to the indicator card.



Then hand her the card. While there are many variations on this idea, this is more than enough to demonstrate the Stanley Collins force can be accomplished without a table.



Although the mechanics of the force are fairly simple, the timing and what you say are crucial to justifying the movement. By meshing together specific timing and movements that match particular words you can make force much, much more effective and convincing. But before you read any further, please make sure you completely understand the mechanics that I've described so far.

Meshing The Mechanics With Words And Movement

Here are the exact words and gestures that I've developed over the last three decades, along with illustrations. Rather than start from the beginning, let's assume the spectator has stuck the indicator card in the deck and confirmed the position. Move your right hand to the deck and start the mechanics of the force.

"Right there? Are you sure?" Move the packet forward on the word "sure".



"...because you can move it up..." Lift the packet slightly to the right and up about 6 inches on the word "up".



"...down..." Lower the packet down five inches with a visible one inch vertical separation.



"...it really..." Move your hands apart a little on the word "really".



"...doesn't..." Place the packets back together.



"...matter..." Move your right hand away in a gesture.



Since my preferred method of Classic Forcing involves holding a break above the force card and then dropping the break as I spread the cards; I just keep track of it visually. So I always have to make a small adjustment to get the break below the force card when I use the Stanley Collins force in conjunction with the Classic Force. Never fear, it's not that hard and you can easily find a way to covertly do this that matches your style.

There's only one thing I've thought of that could go wrong here-- despite your best efforts the spectator might stick the indicator card above the break. If that happens, you can use the following procedure³ and it will easily adapt to the words and the timing.

³ To the best of my knowledge, this procedure is original with me.

Assuming the indicator card is above the break and you're holding a break right below the force card:

Move your left thumb across the deck and grasp all the cards above the break with your right thumb and middle finger.

As you do this, your right middle finger contacts the right edge of the indicator card and angle jogs it to the left. The indicator card pivots between the fork of the left hand and your right middle finger. This should leave you in the position shown at the right.



You should be holding all the cards above the break between your right thumb and middle finger. Lightly contact the indicator card with your left thumb and move the *left hand packet* forward. Please note that in this case, you're moving the left hand packet away from the right hand packet. The packet should move away on a diagonal close to the diagonal of the indicator card.



The indicator card has now cleared and when you replace the packets together it will be face to face with the force card.

This procedure can match the exact words and gestures described above, there's only a one second delay in angle jogging the indicator card.



If you experience a click, make sure your left thumb is just touching the indicator card and not putting pressure on it. Additionally, make sure the packets remain parallel and close together until the indicator card is clear.

By the way-- remember the guy I mentioned who hates his job and takes it out on you by drawing the wrong card? Take the card he pulled out and have another spectator stick it in the deck. Then work with her!

The Classic Force Is Not A Trick

Time and time again, I've seen magicians delight in Classic Forcing the same card again and again on a spectator. This is an abysmal idea. The only possible conclusion the spectator could come to is that you can control which card they choose no matter what. Is that something you want them to believe?

Occasionally I'll have someone name a card and then Classic Force it, but then I'll ask them if they want to know how it's done as I false shuffle, maintaining the force card on top. When they say yes, I'll do a double turnover, show the wrong card and as I turn it over and pull the force card off the deck. As I do all of this, I say "Well it doesn't really matter which card you pull out. As soon as you touch it, it becomes the card you named.. go ahead-- touch it!" As soon as they touch it, turn it face up to show it's changed to the card they named. While this isn't a trick per se, I have to admit it's very satisfying and leads them away from the conclusion that you "made" them take a specific card.

There are two things that prevent people from learning the Classic Force: the lack of a methodology that will allow them to learn the timing and fear. In this monograph I've provided the methodology to learn the timing and hopefully I've eliminated the fear by providing you with a seamless way of covering the few times you'll miss.

Using the tools described here, it's my hope that more magicians will learn and master the best force of all-- The Classic Force.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Youell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Steven" on the top line and "Youell" on the bottom line.